Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

CITIZEN WORKGROUP

Developing Alternatives for Updating the Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan (UMRRFMP)
February 23, 2009
MACo Conference Room (Meeting 2)

SESSION SUMMARY

Process Objectives

1. 6-8 meetings, explore aspects of a fisheries Management Plan for Holter, Hauser, and Canyon Ferry Reservoirs.
2. Within the Workgroup's charter, develop consensus alternatives and recommend those alternatives to FWP.

Session Objectives

1. Refocus based on new factors in the operating environment and "trap lines".
2. Review, discuss, and learn from FWP biological, social, and planning data concerning the Reservoir system.
3. Affirm the Charter and continue development of the collaborative framework.

Workgroup Members Present

Luckie Bethel	Virgil Binkley	Charles Bocock
Bart Bratlien	Doug Breker	Pete Cardinal
Alex Ferguson	Dale Gilbert	Nick Jones
George Liknes	Tim McAlpine	Dan Nottingham
Darren Raney	Timothy Rauser	Keith Schultz
Dan Spence	Pat Volkmar	Arne Wick
Virginia Tribe (Facilitator)		

FWP Technical Support and Observers

Beth Giddings	Eric Roberts
Don Skaar	Chris Hunter

Completed Agenda Items

"Ratifying" the January 12 Meeting Summary

Workgroup members approved the January 12 meeting summary with the following changes

- Richard Thompson will not be able to serve with the Group so there will be 17 members rather than the original 18.

- Members affirmed the importance of their media agreements in the ground rules/process agreements.

Brief Review - Ground Rules/Process Agreements

Meeting attendance

- Attendance is basically "mandatory" for the best interest of the process and Group's outcomes. Acknowledging there are emergencies, Workgroup members will contact Beth or Ginny prior to missing as session.
- Members will not use substitutes or proxies if missing a meeting.

Communication

- Members are requested to raise hands to be recognized by the facilitator.
- To support civility and courtesy, allow the other to finish without interrupting.
- Members are asked to manage their own communication – style, length of time, body language, no vulgar language, no name-calling, etc.
- The Facilitator will help manage the length of time of the person speaking.

Process to encourage coming to agreement

- Members are asked to describe the issue they are bringing to the table. Full Group discussion will follow, monitored by the Facilitator. The Group will decide how far to take the issue, the disposition of the issue, etc.
- Members will aim for 100% agreement and work hard to get there. At points in the discussion, the Facilitator may ask for a relative showing of support for the item at hand to determine the level of majority and minority. She will use an interest-based approach to help the group increase the majority. When the Facilitator feels that all attempts have been made to solve the minority's issues, she has permission to:
  - Ask the Group to table the issue for later discussion or;
  - Move the group to agreement – one way or another - if there is a super majority (80%/20%) of those present.

Media

- Eric (FWP) will be responsible for relaying information from the Workgroup to the media. Members approached by the media will direct the media to Eric.
- It is recognized that Members will report back to their constituents.
- Individual members are asked to couch their comments as personal opinion and not the view of the Group.

Information Sharing/Education/Q/A about the Reservoir System

Beth will distribute Eric's power point presentation to Workgroup members so they are all able to receive it electronically as a pdf document; on a CD or by hard mail.

Workgroup Member Discussion

Observations/A Few Tentative Conclusions/Species-Specific Questions

- Rainbow Trout

- Rainbow trout are doing well; the necessary parts of the system are present and we have a pretty good understanding of that system.
- Current goals for rainbow trout don't match catch rate satisfaction; catch rate satisfaction is very good.
- We're "blessed" with this system for rainbow trout.
- Other species have different dynamics and the system is more complicated for them.
- What can we learn from rainbow trout that could help with the overall Management Plan for the system?

- Perch
  - Perch are expensive to "grow" in a hatchery compared to trout – it's hard to beat Mother Nature in terms of productivity when it comes to perch.
  - Everything/everyone eats perch including other fish species, birds, and humans.
  - There is fairly significant winter pressure on perch.
  - Perch numbers are declining throughout the system. We need to explore the various factors that are contributing to the decline of perch because of their major role in the system.
  - Perch spawning habitat is probably the biggest contributing factor to perch numbers. We need to explore how natural reproduction of perch might be enhanced (i.e., created ponds; removing barriers during spawning; protection of perch gelatinous egg masses, etc.).
  - The current limit may or may not be helping to accomplishing current objectives.
  - How would optimal perch habitat be described?
  - What is not working for perch in the current situation?

- Kokanee
  - In a sense, Kokanee entered/became part of the system in a less than intentional way.
  - FWP has tried to re-establish the Kokanee population but with the exception of Holter, has not been successful.
  - Every few years FWP stocks Holter with the few extra Kokanee that are available – and they are at least sustaining in Holter.
  - Could Canyon Ferry be stocked with Kokanee and to what result?

- Walleye
  - The current goal may not be realistic for today.
  - Forage is a limiting factor particularly when we consider perch and suckers.
  - The size and weight of walleye have been decreasing in the last few years. A fish has to be a pretty good fish to be a trophy fish.
  - Hauser is top-heavy with lower growth rates among younger walleye.
  - The flush goes all the way to Holter.
  - Holter has a pretty good multi-species fishery and that is good for walleye as well as other species. Holter is relatively isolated compared to other water bodies in the system.
  - There is unlimited walleye spawning habitat in the system.

- The catch rate and net data don't match.
- What's happening that's causing walleye not to advance to "older age"? What's in the way of good age distribution and what age distribution do we want where?
- Is the harvest allowed at 13-14 inches in the way of "big fish"?
- What is the purpose of the slot limit and does that purpose/limit still apply? What is it doing/not doing?
- What should the goal be for walleye and why?
- What is not working for walleye in the current situation?

- Suckers (forage species)
  - Suckers are native to the system.
  - Holter – as a more isolated body of water and system – is healthier for suckers.
  - Walleye are big enough and abundant enough to pick off suckers as food.
  - Suckers have generally been decreasing in numbers since 2001.
  - Can we do anything that would increase the sucker population – considering their importance as a forage species?
  - Is this a viability issue for suckers? Have they decreased to a point that they can't really recover?
  - Can suckers be planed? Would "catch and release" for suckers help – especially if anglers understood their role in the system?

- Carp
  - We have in common, rather negative attitudes about carp.

Additional Important Questions

- What is the correlation between number of fish caught ("catch rate") and findings in net surveys?
- How might we collect data with the least impact to fish?
- In terms of "catch rate' and relative abundance, what should the goal be for each species?
- Should/how can fish size be part of a goal?
- What's the best size and number for planting per species?
- How do we get to the positive situation we have for Rainbow Trout – with the other species in the multi-species fishery?
- What criteria should be used to designate a "warm water" fishery and are we using/applying that criteria appropriately (e.g., Hauser)?
- Where do carp fit in the system? What do we know about carps' diet?
- Where do birds fit in the system?
- How can we successfully address EPA requirements for dissolved oxygen in the water?
- How can we successfully manage upstream flushing as it affects fish?
- Should we be looking at the whole system in an integrated way or should we be planning for individual bodies/stretches of water in the system?
- How much should we be concentrating on Canyon Ferry?

- Holter is pretty healthy in terms of species – both size and balance. What makes Holter work as a fairly successful multi-species fishery and what can we learn that might be applied to other parts of the system?

Where do we go from here?

"Homework"

Before the March 6 meeting, Working Group members are asked to:

- Revisit the data presented; "Google" if useful; learn as much as possible – come to the table as informed (all side of issues) as possible.
- Visit "traplines" and ask the following:
  - "What's a satisfactory number of fish to catch in a day?"
  - "How would you describe "healthy fish"?"

Calendar

- Next meeting - March 6, MACo building, 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM with lunch
- Agenda items will include:
  - Continuation of Information/Education with Eric to include coldwater species and their systems; Pike/other species including carp; impacts of birds; and interactions and interpretations of the data
  - Completing the collaborative framework
  - Summary review of the current Management Plan
  - Criteria and first thoughts about alternatives